MARVEL COMICS

NAMED BEST COMIC OF THE MONTH BY WIZARD

EXILES

MARVEL PG 8

A WORLD APART
PART 1 of 3

"I am without a home, and in that I find my place in it all."
–Jonathan Michael Barry
The Steps of the Lords

It's been a while since we last visited them.

Somewhere along the way, they got into calling themselves *The Exiles.*

It was a joke *Morph* made at first. Then later, Dark Phoenix taunted them with it.

Apparently the name had been bouncing around the backs of their heads.

And the longer they live this way of life, the more the name seems *appropriate.*

They have been *thrown out* of their own existences, and are trying to make their way *back.*

And for the most part, they are succeeding... at least they *think* so.

They save, destroy, create, discover, salvage, fight, persevere-- whatever is called for-- to fix the broken chain in time and *move forward* to the next new reality.

And there have been *many.*

A trip to the *Savage Land*...

...one that spanned *two continents.*

They fell into the service of *President Tony Stark*...

...until he was *assassinated.*

There was also the reality they referred to as *"The Gamma Planet"*...

...with Gamma radiation present in the atmosphere at such *remarkable* levels that nearly all the world's inhabitants were *enhanced.*

They aided in the downfall of the *Spider Demon*, who had ruled over an entire city for close to a *decade*.

It was *Morph* who finally defeated it.

Then there were the *X-Babies*.

The less said, the *better*.

And an excruciating week with the *Antelope Men*.

Believe me, you don't *even* want to know.

And many other realities...

The team has no control over *how long* they stay in each world.

When they accomplish their task, the *Tallus*-- the mysterious device that teleports them from reality to reality-- spirits them away almost *instantly*.

Sometimes, however, they're granted a bit of *respite.*

Hours, maybe days... they can never really anticipate how long.

Once, even a *week.*

They were given the simple assignment of *"thwarting a bank robbery."*

It took them less than an *hour* to accomplish their task, so they enjoyed the remainder of their time on an isolated island off the coast of Australia.

Isolated enough for some to go *"native"...*

...that is, once Sunfire got rid of Morph by convincing him to help her shop for *lingerie.* Again, it's a *long story.*

And over the months, they've all become *closer.*

Some more than *others.*

Their most recent excursion, however, has proven to be the most *difficult.*

The Exiles were caught by *surprise...*

...and now each of them has adopted an approach of attaining *small victories.*

Weeks ago, Nocturne had been going *easier* on her competitors.

Despite their lack of diplomacy, TJ saw no reason to give in to *barbarism.*

She saw how *poorly* she was judging the situation. She had to *survive.* She had to *move on.*

And if it meant seriously injuring her opponents-- *so be it.*

She was left with *no alternative.*

A WORLD APART

PART ONE OF THREE

They've been prisoners of the *Skrulls* for over a month.

This is *Earth*...

...and it's under the rule of the *Skrull Empire*.

It's been this way for over a *century*.

DID YOU *WIN*?

OF *COURSE* I WON.

I *ALWAYS* WIN.

GOOD.

Like Nocturne, *Mimic* has won all his bouts, as well.

He intends to keep *racking up* victories. Buying time is their only and last alternative.

WHO'S SHE FIGHTING NEXT? THAT CAT WOMAN?

NO. SHE'S FIGHTING THE AFRICAN FEMALE. WITH THE WHITE HAIR.

BUT SHE'S A *FLYER.* SINCE *WHEN* DO THEY MIX FLYERS IN WITH GROUNDERS?

SINCE *THIS* ONE BEAT THE HELL OUT OF EVERYONE IN HER WEIGHT CLASS.

YOU'RE A *TOUGH* LI'L THING FOR A FREAK HUMAN SOLID.

DROP DEAD.

HA!

YEAH, SHE'S A TOUGH ONE. WE'LL SEE HOW YOU MANAGE THE WEATHER-WITCH, THOUGH. SHE THROWS *LIGHTNING!*

After a major shift in the *Skrull-Kree War,* the Skrull Empire decided to set up an outpost on Earth. Or more to the point, to make the *entire* planet a Skrull military base.

This was a time just prior to the *Industrial Revolution...* before *electric light* was commonplace, before *automobiles* replaced the horse.

And in a time before world culture had been infused with the early *science fiction* of H.G. Wells and just shortly after Jules Verne began writing...

...the *reality* of what happened soon surpassed anything that anyone could ever imagine.

Humanity was *less* than helpless. Before any kind of fight could be mobilized, it was *over.*

For the Skrulls, it wasn't considered a challenge or even a true "takeover". This wasn't a world to conquer, it was a place to *park.*

There were no instructions, no orders, no rules. Human beings were simply told to "*GO.*"

And within just a *decade,* the cities and towns that had been leveled to make room for military outposts were converted into *Skrull colonies.*

But the tide of the great Skrull-Kree War eventually turned again, and Earth's military usefulness became *outdated.*

But the mild climate, good agriculture and weak inhabitants seemed *far too good* to let go of.

The people of Earth *adapted.* Their culture became one *without* technology. The planet they were destined to rule instead became one where they lived on the *fringes.*

Humans finally had their place-- the *unseen underclass.*

And with the exception of human servants, the red light districts, and the tendency for Skrull teenagers to enrage their parents by exploring human art and music, there was very little *interaction* between the humans and their oppressors.

Except for *The Games.*

Fifty years ago they began *popping up.*

Superhumans. Some different by birth, others by accidental exposures to radiation, still others from aberrant genes shocked into life by physiological trauma.

But the reasons made *no difference.* The earliest ones were *destroyed* before rebellion was even an inkling. But as their numbers grew, an idea was hatched-- ***entertainment.***

The Skrulls were a *warlike* people-- they enjoyed a good fight. So, for close to thirty years, the Skrull colony of Earth has been known for *The Games.*

When the Exiles teleported into this world, they landed right in the middle of a *busy city block.*

Overpowered and captured within moments, they were immediately sent to the *competitor camp.*

At first they were *reluctant* to fight. But death being the only alternative, their *survival instincts* soon took over.

And now they *wait.*

They hold out hope for *rescue.*

Unfortunately, their hope is beginning to *run out.*

YOU THERE-- WHO IS THAT *PRISONER?*

THIS ONE? A COMPETITOR

WHAT'S IT DO NG OUT OF THE *COMPOUND?* ESCAPED COMPS ARE KILLED *ON SITE,* SOLDIER. IS THIS ONE A *RUNNER?*

NO SIR-- SHE'S *NEW.* WE FOUND HER AT ONE OF THE OUTLY NG HUMAN CAMPS. IT WAS A SURPRISE, I MUST SAY. SHE'S A *BIG ONE.*

BIG *INDEED.* FULLY GROWN. HOW DID IT SLIP PAST THE *RAIDS* ALL THESE YEARS?

IT DOESN'T HAVE SOME *CLOAKING ABILITY* THAT GOT PAST OUR SENSORS, DOES IT?

EVEN THE ONES THAT TURN INVISIBLE OR CHANGE SHAPE CAN'T GET PAST THE *DENSITY APPARATOR* ON A FULL SPECTRUM BURST.

WHERE WERE THEY HIDING HER? UNDER THIRTY FEET OF *ROCK?*

NOT MUCH OF A READING . *LEVEL FOUR* MUTANT. HER GENETIC CODE DOESN'T *MATCH* W TH ANY IN CAPTIVITY. .

SIR, WHAT'S THAT *SECOND* READING?

SECOND? WAIT, YOU'RE *RIGHT.* IT'S AS IF THERE'S ANOTHER... MUTANT...

NICE CHATTING! GOTTA BAIL!

CLARICE! I FIGURE I CAN BUY US ONE SECOND!

HOLD, HUMAN!

WE'RE GONE, MORPH!

SUBDUE HER-- WE'LL BRING HER BEFORE THE COMMANDER!

MORPH--! A LITTLE HELP!

I'M BUSY MYSELF, CLARICE-- I'M NOT THE ONLY CHANGELING ON THE BLOCK AT THE MOMENT!

AAH! SCRATCHING! VERY GIRLIE FOR WARLORDS, YA KNOW!

BLINK

FINE. SO MUCH FOR KEEPING MY *POWERS* A SECRET.

A TELEPORTER!

SOMEONE GET A FIX ON HER *ENERGY SIGNATURE!*

BLINK

QUIT *WHINING* AND *DRIVE*, OKAY! WE'RE ABOUT TO BECOME THE NEXT--

BLINK

--DOUBLE B.LL IN THE SKRULL WREST.ING FEDERAT ON'S *DEATH CAGE MATCH!*

MORPH, SHUT UP.

ALL I'M SAYING IS THAT I ASP RE TO *LOFTIER* GOALS THAN GETT NG MY BUTT KICKED TO *SHOULDER LEVEL* BY SUPER GLAD ATOR TYPES!

THEY'D PROBABLY STICK ME UP AGAINST THE *SHE-HULK!* TALK ABOUT *EMBARRASSING... WHAT A WAY TO GO*, BUT EMBARRASSING.

THIS ISN'T *FUNNY*, MORPH! .T TOOK US *TWO WEEKS* TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO GET PAST THE CITY BOUNDARY SENSORS-- AND IT TOOK US THREE WEEKS *BEFORE* THAT TO EVEN *FIND* THE C;TY!

IF THEY RECONFIGURE ALL THE SAFE-GUARDS, WE'RE BACK WHERE WE *STARTED!*

HEY, TAKE IT *EASY*, CLARICE, WE'LL THINK OF--

OF *WHAT!?* WE'LL THINK OF *WHAT*, MORPH?!

THERE IS *NO WAY IN!* WE *CAN'T* GET TO THEM! I CAN'T *TELEPORT* CLOSE ENOUGH BECAUSE OF THE R *ENERGY FIELDS*, AND WE CAN'T *SNEAK IN* BECAUSE OF THEIR *SENSORS!*

EVEN IF WE COULD *FLY* IN--MORE SENSORS AND ANOTHER FIELD. NO TUNNELS, NO SEWER SYSTEMS...

...IT'S BEEN A *MONTH* NOW AND EACH DAY OUR FRIENDS GET ONE BREATH CLOSER TO GETTING *MURDERED* IN SOME @*#% GAME!*

WE'LL GET 'EM OUT, BLINKIE.

Damn right, we'll get 'em out

ALL RIGHT, KIDS.

TIME TO MEET THE *MAIN.*

OH! AND ANOTHER STUNNING BLOW FROM *CAROSELLA!* THIS COULD BE THE *END* OF THUNDERBIRD!

HE'S REALLY BEEN *DISAPPOINTING* THIS ROWDY CROWD TODAY! THEY *DEMAND* HE SHAPESHIFT INTO HIS *ANIMAL* MODE!

I'M AFRAID THE AUDIENCE MIGHT LEAVE *DISSATISFIED* WITH TODAY'S PERFORMANCE .. AND THUNDERBIRD WILL BE LEFT WITH *ANOTHER* MAJOR LOSS!

Another major loss and half rations for a week.

C'mon, John. You need to *eat.*

AH, I SEE THE JUDGES HAVE ILLUMINATED THE *BLUE LEVEL* WARNING BEACON! WE'RE ONLY *MOMENTS* AWAY FROM TH S BOUT BEING TERMINATED!

"GET UP, JOHN, YOU STUBBORN SON OF A--"

BOOM!

OOOH! HE COMES *ALIVE!* *THUNDERBIRD COMES ALIVE!*

YOU COULD HEAR THAT BLOW ALL THE WAY *UP HERE,* CITIZENS! ANOTHER AMAZING COME-FROM-BEH ND ATTACK FROM THE FREAKISH, BRUTE-HUMAN SOLID NAMED *THUNDERBIRD!*

GOOD BOY.

LOOKS LIKE WE WON'T BE HEARING FROM *CAROSELLA* ANY T.ME SOON, THOUGH

BUT THUNDERBIRD WILL BE BACK IN TWO SUN CYCLES TO FACE OFF AGAINST THE DREADED *MAMMOTH.* WORD HAS IT THAT A *BITTER RIVALRY* HAS ARISEN BETWEEN THE TWO MONSTROUS CREAT URES ,

...PERHAPS OVER A *FEMALE!* OR PERHAPS OVER WHO W,LL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE ON THE MAXI-HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION, *BANNER BEAST!* IT ALL REMA'NS TO BE SEEN.

"BANNER BEAST" SHOULDN'T BE A PROBLEM, HUH, JOHN? TOOK ONE OF *THEM* DOWN BEFORE

COM.NG UP NOW... THE WILY *MIMIC* AND THE FUR-BACKED *BEASTLING!*

SHOVE IT, CAL.

I HOPE YOUR MATCH GOES BETTER THAN YOUR "*PEP TALK*" WITH T-BIRD DID, CALVIN.

BY THE WAY, I WAS IN CLEAN-UP WITH *NOCTURNE* THIS MORNING... SHE'S GETTING SQUIRRELLY ABOUT SOMETHING. SHE SEEMED... *PANICKED.* I THINK WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF *TIME.*

AND HERE COMES *MIMIC!*

YEAH, WELL, HAVE SOME *FAITH,* MARIKO..

"...THAT'S WHAT KEEPS *ME* GOING."

WHY EXACTLY SHOULD WE *BELIEVE* YOU?

YEAH. WE'VE BEEN *BEGGING* FOR HELP FROM ANYONE WITHOUT GREEN SKIN AND A RIDGED CHIN S.NCE WE *GOT* HERE.

AND ALL WE'VE GOTTEN IN RETURN IS A LOT OF *CURSING...* THE REAL *BAD* WORDS, TOO.

HEY, THEY'RE *AFRAID* OF YOU-- AND CAN YOU *BLAME* THEM? ANYONE WITH ABILITIES GETS DRAGGED TO THE GAMES, AND *HARBORING* ANY ADVANCED HUMAN MEANS PUNISHMENT.

BUT THAT'S JUST BEING *HOPEFUL*, 'CUZ "PUNISHMENT" USUALLY EQUALS "*DEATH*".

OKAY. SO WHY ARE *YOU* THE CAT WITH ALL THE INTESTINAL FORTITUDE?

HE TALKS FUNNY, DOESN'T HE?

I'M GLAD *SOMEONE* ELSE THINKS SO.

AS FAR AS WHY I'D BOTHER WITH YOU, WELL, I'M THE MAN WITH THE *PROPER CONNECTIONS*.

THE NAME'S *SAM WILSON*.

BLINK AND *MORPH*. LEAD ON, BUT BE WARNED WE'RE HAVING A *BAD DAY*.

YOU CAN SAY *THAT* AGAIN. YOU *YELLED* AT ME, BLINK! THIS PLANET IS A *HARD ENOUGH* BLOW TO MY EGO--

--a world full of shape-shifters, a kid's gotta have his own bag y'know--

--WITHOUT YOU GETTING ALL *SNARKY*.

"WHO'S ON TODAY?"

"*SUNFIRE* VS. *AVALANCHE*. REAL UNEVEN IF YOU ASK ME. SHE'S GONNA *DESTROY* HIM."

"THINK SO?"

"ABSOLUTELY. SHE'S A *FLYER*. THE ONLY REASON THEY MATCHED THEM UP IN THE FIRST PLACE WAS TO GIVE *STORM-TORCH* A CHANCE TO RECOVER FROM HIS BOUT WITH *BANSHEE*."

"AT LEAST HE WON TORCH SHOULD MAKE FOR AN INTERESTING BATTLE WITH THIS ONE. WE HAVEN'T HAD A DECENT MATCH BETWEEN TWO *FLAME-WIELDERS* SINCE... WELL, SINCE TORCH KILLED *FIRE LASS*.

"*THAT* WAS A GOOD FIGHT."

"YES, IT WAS. THIS IS *AWFUL*."

YEAH, SHE ALWAYS *HOLDS BACK.* SHE USED TO JUST INCREASE THE TEMPERATURE AROUND HER COMPETITORS' HEADS UNTIL THEY *PASSED OUT.*

RIGHT. I BET THE KEEPERS LAID DOWN THE *LAW* ON HER. "PUT UP A DECENT BATTLE OR IT'S A *RADION LASER* TO THE BACK OF THE *HEAD!*"

YEAH, I-- *DEVILS ABOVE--* ENGINEERING WANTS ANOTHER DIAGNOSTIC ON THE CORE RELAY SYSTEM.

Aboard the Skrull master scout vessel, The Day Catcher.

One light year from Earth.

AGAIN? IT MISFIRED A *SINGLE* TIME IN THE LAST CONFIGURATION. *ONCE!* WE'VE CHECKED IT *SEVEN TIMES* SINCE THEN.

WELL, I'M NOT RAISING *MY* VOICE IN PROTEST. THIS TOUR OF DUTY ENDS IN *THREE ROTATIONS* AND THEN WE GET LEAVE-TIME. DON'T WANT TO BOTCH *THAT* UP.

WHERE ARE YOU PLANNING TO GO? *EARTH* AGAIN? WE'RE SO CLOSE YOU CAN SAVE TRAVEL TIME AND USE IT TOWARDS YOUR LEAVE.

I HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT IT. I HEAR THEY'VE LOOSENED THE RESTRICTIONS ON THE RED LIGHT ZONE. I'VE BEEN A LITTLE CURIOUS ABOUT *"TAKING IN THE SIGHTS."*

YOU ARE *TRUE SCUM,* MIKALLA. I DON'T--

BA-DOOM!

BY THE EMPIRE!

WE'RE BEING ATTACKED!

WE HAVE *HULL BREACHES* ON BOTH LOWER DECKS!! I CAN'T REACH THE BRIDGE ON COM LINK--

WAIT! WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF *A METEOR SHOWER!*

"HOW IN THE EMPRESS'S NAME COULD A *METEOR SHOWER* NOT BE DETECTED ON SENSORS *FOUR SECTORS* AGO?!"

"IT'S NOT *POSSIBLE!* IT'S AS IF--"

By the names of the mother.

SEND A *DISTRESS BEACON* TO EARTH!

TELL THEM TO *EVACUATE* THE PLANET!

NOW! NOW! BEFORE HE--

The message was *never sent.* It happened *too fast.*

It's *ironic,* really. His purpose is to prepare for the *greater arrival.*

Almost like *announcing* the upcoming event.

He is *Terrax the Tamer.* In his past life he was *a warrior. A ruler.*

He answered to nothing but his *own will.*

Now, he is *a Herald.*

He seeks out *sustenance* for his *master.*

His master is

GALACTUS

The eater of worlds.

They are coming for *Earth.*

ARE WE *ALMOST THERE?* IF NOT, COULD WE PULL OVER AND GET A *HAPPY MEAL* OR SOMETHING?

THESE UNSTABLE MOLECULES DON'T *FEED THEMSELVES* Y'KNOW.

OUR HOST WILL HAVE SOME EXCELLENT FOOD... BEST AROUND, TRUTH BE TOLD.

LOOK, WE'VE GIVEN YOU JUST ABOUT *EVERYTHING* ON US, SAM... IF YOU WOULDN'T MIND, I'M A LITTLE CURIOUS ABOUT *WHO* EXACTLY WE'RE MEETING.

IS HE THE "LEADER OF THE UNDERGROUND" OR SOMETHING?

WELL, WE DON'T REALLY *HAVE* AN UNDERGROUND. THAT IS, IF YOU MEAN ONE THAT'S PLANNING A *REBELLION.*

WE'RE MOSTLY INTERESTED IN *SURVIVAL.* HE'S BEEN A GREAT HELP IN THAT AREA.

AND I'D SAY THE BEST WAY TO DESCRIBE THE BIG MAN IS... WELL, HE'S AN *INVENTOR.*

HE'S CREATED BETTER FARMING TECHNIQUES. BETTER LIVING ENVIRONMENTS. AND *HEALTH,* OH MAN, HAS HE *EVER* BEEN A GODSEND WHEN IT COMES TO *MEDICINE.*

HE'S BEEN PRETTY *ISOLATED* THE LAST TEN YEARS, THOUGH. SEE, HE HEADED UP AN ESCAPE PLAN THAT WENT *SOUR.*

HE AND A THREE-MAN CREW STOLE A *SKRULL SHIP* AND LIT OUT OF ORBIT. BUT THEY RAN INTO TROUBLE. ONE OF THEM *DIED.*

THE OTHER TWO CAME BACK CHANGED.

CHANGED?

YEAH. LIKE Y'ALL. *ADVANCED HUMANS.* THEY GOT TAKEN OFF TO THE GAMES...

...HE MANAGED TO ESCAPE.

OH, HEY-- HERE'S OUR BOY.

OH, WOW.

HELLO. SO GLAD YOU COULD JOIN US.

I'M REED RICHARDS.

Continued...